



# Memorials on state highways

Remembering a loved one

New guidance to the Wisconsin Department of  
Transportation's policies on roadside memorials



## Guidelines for memorials along Wisconsin roadsides

Loss of life from a traffic crash has a devastating impact on families and friends of the victim. A loved one is suddenly no longer with us. Wisconsin Department of Transportation and county highway maintenance employees understand the distressing shock of such a loss of life. They also recognize that some people grieve by placing a memorial within a highway right-of-way near the crash site.

While the department acknowledges the need some people feel to express themselves in this way, the placement of memorials within a roadway's right-of-way is not allowed under state statutes. Roadside memorials may also be a safety hazard.

### **What *can* I do?**

Current policy for the department is to remove a memorial as soon as possible if it poses a safety concern, for example:

- If it interferes with roadway safety features or vision
- If it negatively impacts the free flow of traffic
- If it would be a hazard should it be hit

A memorial will also be removed if:

- It interferes with routine maintenance
- It falls into disrepair
- The department receives a complaint

Otherwise, the memorial typically will not be removed.

If a memorial is removed, the owner is contacted, if known, and told where it may be retrieved. Individuals should understand that any memorial placed on public right-of-way is temporary and should expect it would not remain in place for more than a year.

The department strongly encourages grieving parties who wish to place a memorial near the site of the fatal crash to work with an adjoining landowner to designate an appropriate location, off a road's right-of-way, for placement of a memorial.

## **Adopting a highway as an alternative**

As an alternative form of memorial, the department allows friends and family to adopt a two-mile-long highway segment under the Adopt-a-Highway program with signage that notes that the highway has been adopted in memory of .... The sign is installed by the state in compliance with federal and state standards. Those who adopt a highway are required to clean their adopted roadway at least three times a year.

The benefits of this approach are that the deceased can be recognized in a manner that conforms to state statutes and allows mourners to positively affect Wisconsin's roadsides while giving them access to the crash site at least three times a year. They would not be allowed to maintain a separate roadside memorial.

Under special circumstances, the department has worked with grieving families to place plantings at a rest area near a crash scene. This has allowed mourners to gather together off the immediate roadway right-of-way to remember their lost loved one.

## **Safety is the department's highest priority**

No one wants to see a subsequent tragedy result from a previous incident. For safety's sake, statutes require that only items that perform a specific highway function are allowed within a highway right-of-way.

Mourners who stop to maintain a memorial not only place themselves in danger, they also put other motorists at risk. Additionally, it's against state law to stop along an interstate or freeway except in an emergency or because a vehicle breaks down.



For more information on roadside memorials contact:

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[www.dot.wisconsin.gov/business/rules/memorials.htm](http://www.dot.wisconsin.gov/business/rules/memorials.htm)